

# ATTITUDES TOWARDS SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS:

## A NATIONAL SURVEY OF PARENTS IN CANADA

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### BACKGROUND

- Comprehensive school-based sexual health education plays a key role in providing young people with the information, motivation, and skills needed to maintain and enhance their sexual health during adolescence and into adulthood<sup>1</sup>
- Perceptions of parents' opinions and their anticipated reactions to curriculum can influence the development, revision, and delivery of school-based sexual health education curricula<sup>2</sup>

### OBJECTIVES

- Examine attitudes towards school-based sexual health education in a national sample of parents/guardians in Canada
- Identify at what grades parents want sexual health education topics introduced
- Determine regional similarities or differences in support for sexual health education

### RESULTS



85% of parents agreed that sexual health education should be provided in the schools



Support highest in the Atlantic Provinces, Prairie Provinces, and BC (Table 1)

**METHODS**

- 2000 parents/guardians across Canada
- online survey assessing support for sexual health education in schools

- High levels of parental support for all 33 topics (ranging from 86.8%-98.7%; see Table 2)
- Most parents wanted 30 of the 33 topics to be introduced in the elementary/middle school grades
- Quebec: most parents wanted each topic introduced in the elementary/middle grades

Table 1. Parental level of agreement that sexual health education should be provided in schools, Canada and regions.

	Canada		Atlantic Provinces		Quebec		Ontario		Prairie Provinces		British Columbia	
	% (N)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	
Agree, Strongly Agree	84.9(1688)	90.9 (110)a	83.4 (447)b	81.88 (652)b	89.2 (297) a	90.1 (182)a	99 (20)a					
Neither agree nor disagree, strongly disagree	15.1(301)	9.1 (11)a	16.6 (89) b	18.2 (145)b	10.8 (36)a	9.9 (20)a						

Note. Participants who asked to rate their agreement with the statement "sexual health education should be provided in the schools."  
Shared subscript (a, b) indicates Region whose column proportions do not differ significantly from each other at the .05 level.  
X<sup>2</sup> (4) = 19.30, p = .001,  $\Phi = .10$

### CONCLUSIONS

#### Majority of parents:

Support sexual health education in the schools

Want a range of comprehensive sexual health topics covered

Support introducing most topics in the elementary/middle school grades

Table 2. Grade level at which parents indicate topics should be introduced in school-based sexual health education.

TOPIC	PERCENT INDICATING INTRODUCTION AT EACH GRADE LEVEL					SHOULD NOT BE TAUGHT
	K-3	4-5	6-8	9-10	11+	
<b>MEDIAN GRADE 4-5</b>						
Body autonomy (e.g., choosing whether or not they want a hug)	35.9	20.8	19.8	11.9	8.6	3
Correct names for body parts, including genitals	36.4	22	20.7	10.6	8.6	1.7
Self-esteem and personal development	30.4	23	23.3	12.4	9.3	1.5
<b>MEDIAN GRADE 6-8</b>						
Abstinence	2.4	14.9	38.5	20.2	15.3	8.7
Attraction, love, intimacy	6.3	20.2	33.6	20.4	14.8	4.6
Birth control methods	1	9	39.9	26.5	19.9	3.7
Body image	24.2	25.1	24.2	14	9.3	3.1
Changes associated with puberty (e.g., physical, biological, psychological, emotional, social)	4.1	33.4	33.5	16.8	10.9	1.3
Communication skills	27.9	21.3	24.4	14.7	9.7	1.9
Dealing with pressure to be sexually active	1.6	13.4	40.7	23.3	16.5	4.4
Decision making skills	17.2	20.1	30.9	17.8	12.1	2
Emotional components of sexual relationships	2.4	12.4	37.2	26.2	17.8	4
Gender identity (i.e., our internal sense of who we are; e.g., girl/woman, boy/man, etc.)	18.3	19.9	26.1	14.1	11.3	10.3
Gender roles and stereotypes	13	20.6	28.8	18.2	11.5	8
How to access sexual and reproductive health services	1.6	10.7	38.7	26.4	19.4	3.3
Information about masturbation	2.4	14.5	35.4	22.9	15	9.8
Media literacy skills related to sexual content in advertising, TV, pornography, etc.	2.9	18.6	33.1	22.7	15.9	6.8
Nonviolent conflict resolution in relationships	16.1	15.7	30.2	21	14.6	2.3
Personal safety (e.g., abuse prevention)	25.6	21.1	25.6	14.9	11.2	1.6
Prevention of sex trafficking	5.2	16	34.2	24.5	16.3	3.8
Reasons to engage or not engage in sexual activity	2.6	12.3	41.6	22.6	15.5	5.4
Reproduction	7.6	21.4	35.1	19.9	14.2	1.8
Safer sex methods (e.g., condom use)	0.9	10.1	40	25.4	20.2	3.4
Sexual and gender-based violence/harassment/coercion	8.2	20	33.6	21.3	13.6	3.3
Sexual behaviour (i.e., variation in sexual behaviour; e.g., kissing, intercourse)	2.6	15.1	37.9	22.1	16.4	5.9
Sexual consent (e.g., asking for and giving consent for sexual activity)	6.6	15.8	36.5	21.3	15.7	4.2
Sexual orientation	9.5	18.7	31.6	18.6	12.4	9.2
Sexuality and communication technology (e.g., "sexting")	1.8	17.7	39.7	20.6	14.5	5.7
Sexuality and disability (e.g., physical disabilities, developmental disabilities)	5.5	14.3	33.5	24.1	17.7	5
Sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV	1.2	12.5	43.4	23.4	17.7	1.8
<b>MEDIAN GRADE 9-10</b>						
Sexual behaviour in relationships	1.6	10.3	36.9	26.5	19.5	5.2
Sexual pleasure	1.8	8.3	30.1	27.2	19.3	13.2
Sexual problems and concerns	1.8	10.7	34.6	28.5	19.4	5

- REFERENCES**
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